Tweets of a Feather Flock Together: An Analysis of the Impact of Twitter in a Class of Translation

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, social networks (SN) are increasingly extended at a professional and personal level, and their use has also been included in educational contexts. In the field of translation and interpretation, in which this proposal is framed, the use of SN seems even more relevant, since working as a freelancer is one of the main professional opportunities of translators and interpreters. This article analyses the impact of Twitter on the learning process of an English class for students of the degree in translation and modern languages in terms of enhancing their communicative competence in English while at the same time increasing their motivation with an approach to professional reality. This analysis was part of a pilot study to examine to what extent the use of this social network could be useful and positive for our students.

KEYWORDS

Communicative Competence, Education, ESL, Motivation, Pilot Study, Professional Opportunities, Reading, Translating and Interpreting, Writing

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays social networks (from now on SN) are increasingly extended at a professional and personal level, and their use has also been included in educational contexts. In the field of translation and interpretation, in which this proposal is framed, the use of SN seems even more relevant, since working as a freelancer is one of the main professional opportunities of translators and interpreters. For these professionals, marketing strategies to advertise their services is of the utmost importance. In fact, Marking (2017) qualifies freelance translators as “the lifeblood of the language services industry”, since although companies have translators on staff, it is always necessary to maintain a contact base of freelance translators who can be specialized in a topic and provide specific solutions that adapt to the client’s requirements at a specific time. This same author gives as an example the case of the EU Court of Justice and the European Central Bank, institutions that, despite having translators on staff, have included the hiring of freelancers in their budget. Faced with this situation, SN can be very useful for freelance translators to advertise their services to potential clients. The objective of any marketing activity is undoubtedly communication with current and future clients, and their development (Richardson, Gosnay & Carrol, 2013, p. 15). In this sense, we can affirm that
the translation sector has benefited greatly from marketing in SN, since these represent a new means for translators to be known and advertise the services they offer as professionals.

Taking this professional situation into account and also the fact that SN are part of the process of interaction among students, we considered designing a teaching innovation proposal using Twitter in the classroom. The reason for this choice is based on the fact that it promotes professional development (Hitchcock & Young, 2016) and it also helps students extend their personal learning network (Luo, Sickel & Cheng, 2017), as well as feel part of a worldwide community. Moreover, even though there is an increasing number of studies on the use of social media at the university level and their positive impact in terms of promoting informal learning (Abella & Delgado, 2015), cooperative learning (Prestridge, 2014) as well as interaction and scholarly engagement (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Chawinga, 2017), we believe that it is a practical way of linking the academic context of the classroom to the practical reality of the profession from the very first levels of students’ translation training.

The aim of this paper is to analyse students’ perceptions on the impact of Twitter on their learning process in an English class of the Degree in Translation and Modern Languages in terms of enhancing their communicative competence in English while at the same time increasing their motivation with an approach to professional reality. This analysis was part of a study to examine to what extent the use of this social network could be useful and positive for our students instead of writing learning logs, since this activity was something that students declared that they did not enjoy and thus did not benefit their learning.

The methodology used for the study was qualitative. The research questions (RQ) were adapted to a translation training context based on a previous study conducted in the field of Education (Abellá et al., 2018) but that we considered replicable for ours because of what it aimed at analysing in terms of educational purposes:

**RQ1:** What perceptions do students have about what they learn using Twitter?

**RQ2:** Will the use of Twitter promote critical thinking in students using English as a second language?

**RQ3:** Will the use of Twitter enhance students’ motivation?

**RQ4:** Will the use of Twitter increase students’ interest in the translation and interpreting profession?

More specifically these were the research objectives (RO) in line with the above mentioned RQ:

**RO1:** To analyse students’ perceptions about their learning using Twitter in an ELT classroom.

**RO2:** To promote students’ critical thinking skills when using English as a second language.

**RO3:** To increase students’ motivation towards the learning of a second language.

**RO4:** To determine to what extent the use of this SN could be of interest for the professional future of students who belong to the Degree of Translation.

**BACKGROUND**

**To Tweet or Not to Tweet?**

Twitter, though being the youngest of all micro-blogs, is among the top two tools chosen by educators to use in their classrooms (Haythornwaite, 2016), ranked before other popular tools such as Facebook. As previously mentioned, there are a number of studies that focus on the great potential of Twitter in language learning (Chisega-Negrila, 2015; Kumar Sah, 2015; Hattern & Lomicka, 2016), as it takes the teaching and learning process beyond formal lessons (Ebner et al., 2010; Evans, 2014) and it increases motivation, engages students and connects them with the real world (Kumar Sah, 2015, p. 13) and, consequently, with cultural awareness. Digital immediacy, briefness as well as contact with popular culture allow teachers to transform the class and the way students learn, both inside and outside the traditional classroom. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted that interaction is the key to active
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